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**File Code:** 1950  
**Date:** May 30, 2019

Dear Interested Party:

This letter initiates public scoping for the Devil's Hole/Telegraph Trail improvement projects on the Cave Creek Ranger District of the Tonto National Forest. The proposed action includes work at two locations (see attached map):

**Devils Hole:** located at the eastern end of Forest Road 532 where it meets the Verde River between Bartlett and Horseshoe lakes (T7N R6E Section 30).

**Telegraph Trail:** located where Forest Road (FR) 42 meets North Lake Road (Forest Road 459) near Bartlett Lake (T6N R7E Section 15) approximately 11 air miles east from the Cave Creek District Office at 40202 N. Cave Creek Road Scottsdale, Arizona.

## Current Management Direction

Devils Hole is located in Management area 1E which has a primary management emphasis on water oriented developed and dispersed recreation. Telegraph Trail is in 1F which has a primary emphasis on wildlife habitat improvement, and dispersed recreation.

## Purpose and Need

### Devils Hole

As described above, Forest Road (FR) 532 terminates at the Verde River at "Devil's Hole" between Bartlett and Horseshoe lakes. Historically, this site has been an extremely popular destination on the Cave Creek Ranger District as FR532 offers both a challenging and scenic backcountry/4x4 driving experience and access to water recreation (swimming, picnicking, fishing, etc.). The area draws significant visitation from motorized and non-motorized users alike, especially horseback riding. In the past, the popularity of this site has resulted in some litter and sanitation issues as well as impacts to the surrounding vegetation and riparian habitat from repeated travel off of the established road system. Numerous "user-created" or non-system routes have been established in this area as visitors sought access points to the river; during periods of low water flow in the Verde, vehicles were able to cross the river, impacting the stream bed itself and expanding the areas of disturbance to the eastern shoreline. As a result, there is a need to improve management of uses at this location to accommodate user traffic and provide better public information/interpretive signing, while installing barriers to off-road travel to protect important riparian habitat from further degradation.

It should also be noted that the Devil's Hole area lays within a large area currently closed to motorized vehicles; the closure area encompasses all Tonto NF lands north of Bartlett Dam Rd (FR19), east of Seven Springs Road (FR24) and west of the Verde River and FR459 at Bartlett Lake, and south of FR1058. This area was closed following multiple fires to allow the



vegetation to recover and has been in place since approximately 2008. Current conditions suggest that the area has recovered and is capable of supporting motorized travel once again and Cave Creek Ranger District staff are currently working on a plan to re-open the area to motorized uses within the next two years. The purpose of the Devil's Hole project is to have management infrastructure in place prior to reopening the area to motorized uses.

### **Telegraph Trail**

The "Telegraph Trail" is the eastern most segment of FR42 where it drops down into its intersection with North Lake Road (FR459). Much of this portion of the road follows a series of pole placements that were used to support the historic telegraph line that ran near Bartlett Dam; the occasional, small stump of the old poles are all that remain of this line today. The purpose of this project is to rehabilitate and restore the ingress and egress corridor of FR 42 at the intersection of FR459 and improve public safety and "know before you go" information to users.

While FR42 is also within the motorized vehicle closure area described above, this has historically been a very popular Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) and equestrian use area due to its access to the entire St. Clair trail system, scenic views and its authentic history. This road is extremely popular for 4x4 enthusiasts due to high level of technical challenge and is shown on the Tonto National Forest visitor maps. It is anticipated that use of this road will continue to increase once it is reopened to motorized access. Because of this, there is a need to install access facilities (fencing, signage, etc.) at this location to accommodate the anticipated use, provide better public safety information, and interpret historical and environmental values associated with this area. Also, due to the level of technical challenges on this road, there is a need to install a "Gate-Keeper" obstacle at the entrance that will represent the level of driving skill and equipment requirements (high clearance, locking differential, etc.) that are needed to successfully navigate FR42.

### **Proposed Action**

The Cave Creek Ranger Districts proposes work in both the Devil's Hole and Telegraph Trail areas. Additional detailed maps of project activities can be found on the project's website [http://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/nepa\\_project\\_exp.php?project=56161](http://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/nepa_project_exp.php?project=56161).

### **Devils Hole**

This project will consist of the placement of boulders or smaller rocks to define approved areas for parking. Signs, both educational and informational, will then be installed. Other routes and paths to parking/picnicking sites along the river would be delineated to prevent off-road travel within the riparian area. The project will use minimal vegetation removal at existing pathways to designate approved parking areas along the shoreline and the two existing roads in the area. All materials will be brought to the site by four wheel drive vehicles or borrowed from on-site. No heavy equipment will be used due to the remoteness and difficulty in getting to the site.

Educational signs will explain the laws and regulations for the area and offer historical and environmental values associated to this area. A three panel kiosk will be built to provide information including a trail system map, a specific Devil's Hole area map, educational information related to wildlife habitat and vegetation management pertaining to the area. The main parking area will be three quarters of an acre, and boulders will be used to prevent vehicles

from encroaching on the surrounding landscape. The boulders and rocks will be utilized as a natural barrier to exclude OHV impacts on wildlife habitat for species such as Sonoran Desert Tortoise, Gila monster, and other management indicator species in the area. The attached maps show the locations of the proposed areas. This action will also help reduce the impacts of OHV traffic on other resources such as soils and watersheds.

### **Telegraph Trail**

This project will install natural vehicle barriers (vegetation, rocks, etc.), provide a turnaround for vehicles accessing the road from FR 459, and provide a pull out shoulder to perform pre-ride and post-ride vehicle equipment checks needed for safe operation on this route. This route will implement a gate keeper section as a public safety component to help the public decide whether their vehicle is able to handle the challenging road. “Gate Keeper” obstacles will be installed using the local ground material, rocks, and boulders. It can be ten to 20 feet long and wide enough for a full size vehicle to pass through.

A fence line will be constructed to tie together the wire fence along FR459 and a gate installed at the intersection of the fence and FR43. A public information kiosk sign will be installed offering educational information consisting of a trail system map, a specific St. Claire area map, safety information related to the challenge of the road, and educational information related to the history of the telegraph trail and the natural resources in the area. Boulders or smaller rocks will be utilized on both sides of the staging area for about 100 feet as a natural barrier to exclude OHV impacts to wildlife habitat for species such as Sonoran Desert Tortoise, Gila monster and other management indicator species in the area. The attached maps show the locations of the boulders, fence, turn around area, and “gate keepers” in relation to the paved FR 459 (North Lake Road). The fence and gate will be installed first, the delineating of the staging area with boulders will be done next, followed by the gate keeper obstacles and the educational and interpretive signs and kiosks.

### **Comments**

If you have information you feel the Forest Service may not be aware of, especially any extraordinary circumstances, regarding the Proposed Action, **please send these in writing on or before 6/30/2019** by mail to:

Jason Scow  
5140 E Ingram St.  
Mesa, AZ 85205  
480-610-3300

Or by e-mail:

[comments-southwestern-tonto-cave-creek@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-southwestern-tonto-cave-creek@fs.fed.us)

When submitting comments, please keep them specific to this proposal only. Comments which are not specific to the project and project area will be deemed outside the scope of the analysis and will not be considered. If you are including references, citations, or additional information

to be considered for this project, please specify exactly how the material relates to the project. Also indicate exactly what part of the material you would like us to consider (such as page or figure number).

Comments received in response to this scoping notice, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this project and will be available for public inspection. Electronic comments must show name and address of submitter.

Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered. Additionally, any persons may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits such confidentiality (7 CFR 1.27(d)).

If you have questions concerning this process, please contact Tyna Yost at 480-610-3311.

Sincerely,

/s/Micah Grondin  
MICAHA GRONDIN  
District Ranger  
Cave Creek Ranger District

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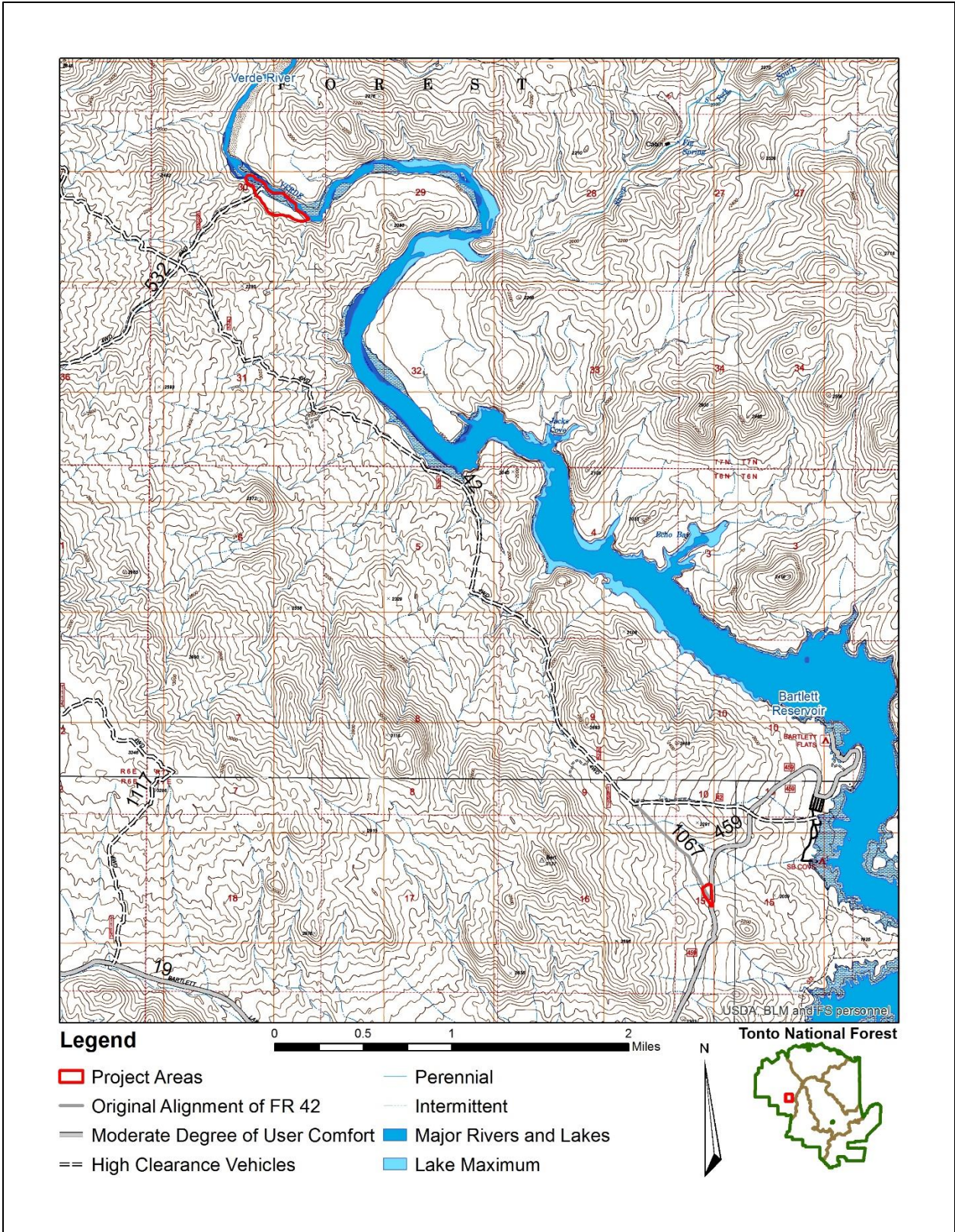


Figure 1: Project Area of the Devil's Hole and Telegraph Trail Projects

